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SUBJECT: EXACT Continues to Play a Vital Role in Fostering  
Arab-Israeli Cooperation on Water

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The USG organized a Steering Committee meeting of the Regional Water Data Banks project (EXACT) July 15 - 16 at the Dead Sea in Jordan. EXACT is a project initiated under the Multilateral Peace Process Working Group on Water Resources. The EXACT meeting brought Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian water officials together for the 24th time since the project started in 1995; officials and experts from the U.S., the UK, the EU, and the Netherlands, whose governments all contribute expertise and resources to project activities, also participated. For the first time in more than one and one-half years, a Palestinian Water Authority official participated in the meeting. In their executive session, the Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian teams agreed on the importance of continuing to work together on the project and pursuing additional possible donors to support their various project activities. The three core parties also agreed to meet again in executive session in Jerusalem in a few weeks to follow up on several action items. The U.S. continues to play a leading role in working with the three core parties to help them develop their Regional Water Training Initiative. END SUMMARY.

EXACT Activities Continue; PA Returns to the Table  
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¶2. (SBU) The Regional Water Data Banks Project (known by the acronym EXACT, representing the name of its steering committee, the EXecutive ACTION Team) consists of a portfolio of technical activities undertaken by the core parties: experts from Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority (PA). All the activities are designed to build capacity and improve the parties' technical capabilities to address a wide range of water issues. At the July 15-16 meeting, the donors, and the Israeli and Jordanian delegations all welcomed the Palestinian Water Authority back to the project. From the time that Hamas took control of the PA until the formation of the Fayad-led PA, Palestinian participation was limited to non-governmental Palestinian water experts and personnel from President Abbas' office.

¶3. (SBU) Despite the difficult conditions under which all EXACT members had been working since March 2006, project activities have continued. The EU reported that it continued to work with the core parties on developing a Decision Support System (a computer program designed to help better manage water resources), carried out training activities, and provided laboratory equipment to the core parties. The EU delegation noted that its current activities will end in mid-2008 and that it looked forward to working with the core parties to develop a proposal for follow-on project activities. The Dutch reported that they have continued to work with the core parties to develop the water treatment and artificial recharge sites in Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. The Dutch will host a regional workshop in Jerusalem in September to discuss results from the different sites. The Dutch delegation also announced that it has extended its project activities through 2010. The UK reported that it has continued to work with the parties to

define the pollution problems present at the project sites and design appropriate mitigation approaches. The UK also noted that it had just finished a very successful regional experts workshop in Aqaba.

14. (SBU) U.S. Chair NEA Senior Advisor for S&T Charles Lawson reported that the U.S. has continued to work with the core parties on their Regional Water Training Initiative. The U.S. sent a three-person expert team to the region in February 2007 to help assess the core parties' training needs and develop the outlines of a work plan for the initiative. All the EXACT members welcomed the expert team's paper as a good first step upon which to build the initiative. The U.S. announced that it would organize a regional workshop in the fall at which experts from the core parties and the donors would develop the detailed initiative work plan. The U.S. also reiterated its commitment to help support implementation of the initiative by offering to support specific training courses once the core parties finalized the work plan.

#### Reaching out to Potential Donors

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15. (SBU) As they have done in the past, the core parties expressed their great interest in bringing new donors into EXACT. Lawson reported that, based on conversations he had had with Swedish officials, Sweden was very interested in becoming a member of EXACT. He noted that in order for the core parties to secure Swedish funds that are available this year, they would have to submit a proposal to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) as soon as possible. The core parties agreed to do so. Lawson also noted that he had been contacted by an Italian NGO that was interested in participating in EXACT activities. EXACT members agreed that contact should be made through the Italian government, since EXACT is a governmental group.

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16. (SBU) The core parties also noted their continued interest in having Norway join EXACT. NOTE: Norway led several multilateral water projects over the years. However, due to internal problems, Norway stopped its participation several years ago. END NOTE. Lawson noted that Norwegian officials continued to express interest in re-engaging on regional water projects but that it was not clear when Norway might make a final decision.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The warm and collegial atmosphere that has exemplified the working relationship among EXACT members over the years was in clear evidence at the mid-July meeting. The Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian EXACT members, as they have done since the project started, demonstrated their continuing commitment to working together on EXACT. The EXACT mechanism, and its focus on technical issues, has provided a forum over the past 12 years for continuous Arab-Israeli cooperation despite regional, political instability.

18. U.S. Chair Lawson has cleared this message.

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